

Queen's College
City University of New York
English Department

English 150W E4MBA

Instructor: Joanna Mansbridge
Office: Klapper Hall, room 356
Class times: M&W, 4:30-5:45
Class room: KY 244
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Course description:

This course will come up with some possible answers to the question: What does it mean to study literature? We begin, first, by tracing the rise of this discipline, and then turn our attention to the texts that are studied within it. We will read both primary texts (fiction) and secondary texts (critical essays and articles) in our exploration of English Studies, a discipline that is continually re-evaluating and redefining itself. While we will consider the aesthetic elements of a literary work, our main focus will be on the text and its author as a product of specific cultural, political, and historical contexts. We will examine both the formal and the political elements of literature, negotiating between issues of form and narrative structure and social elements of readership, production, and reception. The guiding questions of this course are: What is literature? Who gets to decide what literature is and is not? How has literary studies changed over the past century? How are these changes related to changes in broader, global culture? Who is the author? How does an author's cultural and historical context shape how s/he writes? What role do we, as readers, play? How does our own specific historical and cultural context inform the way we read and interpret a text?

Required Materials:

List of Texts:

Literature in the Modern World: Critical Essays and Documents. 2nd edition. Dennis Walder, editor.
Heart of Darkness, Joseph Conrad (Oxford edition)
Beloved, Toni Morrison
Foe, J.M. Coetzee
A Writer's Resource: A Handbook for Writing and Research. Edited by Elaine P. Maimon and Janice H Peritz.

Two Notebooks
A good English dictionary

Course Requirements:

Attendance, Readings, and Participating:

Steady, punctual attendance, as well as class participation, are requirements of this course. Since much of the work will be done in-class through discussion, group work, and in-class writing, missing classes may have a damaging effect on your grade. It is in your best interest to show up every time, on time. I do not

answer emails asking, “What did I miss?” Find someone in this class who you can contact if you need to find out what you missed.

It goes without saying, but I’ll say it anyway: You are expected to do *all* of the readings listed on the syllabus *on* the day they are to be discussed in class. Moreover, you are expected to participate in class discussion.

Formal Essays and Peer Review:

Two formal essays will be due over the course of the semester, in both draft and edited form. You will be working closely with a group of students during the **peer review process**, thus it is crucial that you show up on those days (marked on the schedule) with a rough draft of your essay. Peer review is an invaluable way to get and give feedback on your fellow students’ writing. On every peer review day, you must **bring two copies of your rough draft** and exchange them with your group members. You must draft a written response to each essay that you review and give it back to the student with their essay. They will, then, attach the peer-reviewed rough draft, and hand it in along with the final draft on the day the essay is due.

The first essay will be a research project, in which you choose a novel and situate it within its historical and cultural context, using a theoretical essay as a framework. Your second essay, also a research project, will be comparative, asking you to bring together two of the novels we’ve studied in a provocative, thesis-driven essay. Again, you will be required in this essay to incorporate the theoretical material from our textbook. For all of your essays, you are encouraged to come to me with any questions or concerns about your topic. Alternatively (or additionally), you may want to take advantage of the Writing Center, located in 229 Kiely Hall (718 997-5676). All essays, including rough drafts, are to be typed (double-spaced, Times Roman, 12 point font).

Late essays will be docked one letter grade per day (not per class) that they are late. Additionally, if a final draft is not accompanied by a peer-reviewed rough draft, it will be docked a letter grade.

Blackboard:

The final requirement of this course is the digital writing component. Our course will be assigned a web page on Blackboard, and this will serve as a forum for discussion outside of the class hours. The web page is designed to facilitate a dialogue, and you are encouraged to respond to other students’ postings. You are required to submit **five** postings of your own (2 points each) and **five** responses to other postings (two points each). A valid posting must be at least one fully developed paragraph that analyzes a concept or passage from a text critically. You may also pose a question, one that is reflective and thoughtful. An invalid posting is one that shows little thought or engagement with the readings. For example, a posting that reads: “This guy is crazy” or “She is boring” does not gain you any points. You have to show that you’ve been thinking about the issues raised by the readings.

Scrapbook/In-Class Writing:

The last portion of each class will be devoted to in-class writing, either alone or in groups. **In a notebook devoted specifically to these writing exercises**, you will spend time on a specific writing assignment on the essay and/or novel we have discussed in class. Much of the scrapbook will be devoted to defining and providing examples of key terms we encounter throughout the course and establishing comfort and confidence with bringing together critical theory and fiction. At the end of the semester, you will choose **five entries** you want to be graded for this portion of the course, typing them up and attaching them to the original, hand-written version.

Grading:

Each assignment is allotted the following points:

First Essay: 20 points
Second Essay: 30 points
In-class writing: 20 points
Blackboard: 20 points
Participation (peer review work, and in-class participation): 10 points

Plagiarism:

Plagiarism is the presentation of someone else's ideas, words, or artistic, scientific or technical work as one's own creation. Using the ideas or work of another is permissible only when the original author is identified. Paraphrasing and summarizing, as well as direct quotations, require citations of the original source.

PLAGIARISM IN ANY CAPACITY WILL RESULT IN A FAILING GRADE FOR THE COURSE.

In addition, the act will remain on your permanent record. A second offense could result in suspension or dismissal from the college.

Students who are unsure of how and when to provide documentation are advised to consult their instructor. The library also has guides designed to help students appropriately identify a cited work.

Course Schedule:

NOTE: This schedule is subject to change at my discretion.

Week One:

M 01/28: Introduction, to the class and to each other. HW: Read Terry Eagleton's "Literature and the Rise of English," in *Literature in the Modern World* (hereafter LMW): 31.

W 01/30: Discuss Eagleton; define key terms and issues. HW: Read Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

Week Two:

M 02/04: Discuss Conrad: historical context of colonialism.

W 02/06: Continue with *Heart of Darkness*: symbols, imagery, and narrative structure. HW: Read Edward Said's "The Discourse of the Orient," in LMW 329.

Week Three:

M 02/11: Discuss and define "Orientalism;" Conrad and Said in dialogue. HW: Chinua Achebe's "Imagining Africa," on Blackboard.

W 02/13: Discuss Achebe's interpretation of Conrad; relate to Said.

Week Four:

M NO CLASSES

W 02/20: Achebe and Conrad in dialogue. HW: Stuart Hall, "When was the Postcolonial?" in LMW: 415.

Week Five:

M 02/25: Negotiating the term post-colonial. HW: read Toni Morrison's *Beloved*.

W 02/27: ASSIGN FIRST ESSAY. Discuss *Beloved*. Who or what is Beloved? HW: "Toni Morrison's "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation," in LMW: 301.

Week Six:

M 03/03: Narrative, history, memory, and storytelling. Who gets to narrate history? Discuss *Beloved* and “Rootedness.” HW: Marilyn Butler’s “Repossessing the Past: A Case for an Open Literary History,” in LMW: 20.

W 03/05: Peer Review workshop for first essay. Discuss: Thesis, Motive, and Analysis.

Week Seven:

M 03/10: FIRST ESSAY DUE. Canonicity. Who decides what texts are canonized? What social function does the canon serve? What are the social consequences of opening up the canon? HW: Simone de Beauvoir’s “Woman and the Other,” in LMW: 280.

W 03/12: Discuss women’s function in literary history. HW: Read J.M. Coetzee’s *Foe*.

Week Eight:

M 03/17: Focus on writing: essay feedback and writing workshop. Evidence, style, and structure.

W 03/19: *Foe*’s inter-texts; define and discuss intertextuality. HW: Roland Barthes’s “The Death of the Author,” in LMW: 259.

Week Nine:

M 03/24: NO CLASS

W 03/26 (Classes follow a Monday schedule): Discuss Barthes; relate to *Foe* in terms of narrative authority and intertextuality.

Week Ten:

M 03/31: ASSIGN RESEARCH TOPICS FOR SECOND ESSAY. Discuss *Foe* in terms of postcolonialism, gender and/in language.

W 04/02: Continue with *Foe*. HW: Michel Foucault’s “What is an Author?” in LMW 263.

Week Eleven:

M 04/07: Discuss Foucault; define key concepts. Writing: Foucault and Barthes in dialogue.

W 04/09: Relate Foucault to *Foe*, *Beloved*, and *Heart of Darkness*. HW: Paul de Man’s “Literary History, Literary Modernity,” in LMW: 478.

Week Twelve:

M 04/14: Discuss de Man’s essay in relation to the course thus far. HW: essays.

W 04/17: Peer Review workshop for research essay.

Week Thirteen:

M 04/21: Spring Break

W 04/23: Spring Break

Week Fourteen:

M 04/28: ESSAYS DUE: no exceptions. Pick up with de Man; briefly delve into deconstruction as a literary practice.

W 04/30: Defining our terms so far: reflections, connections. HW: E.D. Hirsch’s “The Babel of Interpretations,” in LMW: 53.

Week Fifteen:

M 05/05: Discuss our interpretive Babel. What does it mean to interpret a text? Why is it a valuable endeavor? HW: prepare scrapbook entries to be handed in

W 05/07: writing workshop: scrapbook revisions

Last Day:

M 05/12: Hand in five scrapbook entries.

W 05/14: Hand back scrapbook entries; concluding remarks